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Colour Affect and the Screenplay: A Prototype for Research-led Practice

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Abstract: This paper investigates the creative aspect of the screenwriting process, specifically how writing and image-making could combine from concept through to script format. The question is whether the screenwriter can utilise written language and literature, or the image and artistic processes. This paper therefore involves a two-way interrogation between the written form of language in screenwriting practice as research and the process of writing with digital production tools, or the *camera-stylo*, a term coined by Alexander Astruc to describe the primacy of the auteur filmmaker and film language. In film studies the use of colour is usually relegated to a design concern vis-a-vis the *mise en scene*, and thus is not considered a direct concern of the screenwriter when constructing the screen idea prior to production. The issue, then, is whether colour, and more specifically if the phenomena of colour affect can be utilised by the screenwriter to influence the emotional tone of a visual narrative that is, beyond a merely descriptive or decorative function to bring about narrative shifts within the screenplay. I propose that a considered use of colour has the potential to express, modulate or structure the emotional tone of the cinematic screenplay and to express complex inner states of being in narrative terms. If understood for its narrative power, the phenomenology of colour affect in a cross-boundary exploration of literature research, screenwriting practice and animation, could offer a new integrated practice-led approach to the process of screenwriting.

Keywords: Screenwriting practice, phenomenology, colour affect, visual narrative

Introduction

Dialogue and action form the substance of the screenplay narrative. However the changing flux of interior human states, that is combined emotion, thought, desire, impulse, and the senses that sometimes course uncharted just under the surface, can be more difficult to clearly verbalise, pinpoint, or even express by the individual, and therefore unseen or unheard interior human states can be inadequately defined in causal screenplay structures when either the progress of story events, character arcs or documentation is the prime focus. More complex layers of meaning, and subjective elements of experience are not prioritized within the causal narrative. Complex interior states of being can be more difficult for human survivors of trauma, the foreigner, and the child to process or verbalise, where verbal language can seem inadequate to express the multidimensionality of the senses, or the visceral experience of trauma. An aim of this paper is to delineate within the form and grammar of the screenplay, that sometimes complex flux of unheard and unseen interior experience, by investigating the affective potential of colour phenomena that gives expression to this sort of invisibility within the written narrative. This paper combines academic research with a practice-based and practice-led approach to the process of screenwriting practice where the creation of an animation provides an exploration of how colour as an element can be utilised to structure the visual narrative of the screenplay, and



impact the audience through the phenomena of colour affect. This process of creative practice gives priority to a reciprocal organic flow of ideas between filmmaking in the form of animation, and the reflective screenwriter as author/ director, experimenting with a prototype for a multisensory, multidimensional, and affective approach to the screenplay narrative. The research-led approach to the narrative entails an exploration of meaning and emphasis between a poem, a created animation and the final screenplay so that new narrative pathways are built between forms, and any theoretical considerations arise from the practice-based research itself. The creation of the experimental animation serves as a visualization aid to explore the narrative potential of colour affect within the action of the screenplay apart from or counter to the designated spoken monologue of a poem. Based on how these different elements combine in the author's experience, how this experience is further interpreted in screenwriting practice, and how within the context of investigating colour affect as a narrative tool to structure the visual narrative apart from dialogue, there is a movement between imaginative, cognitive, material, and affective elements in a phenomenology of screenwriting practice throughout the research.

Colour and Narrative Potential

No light falls on people and things in which transcendence would not appear. Indelible in resistance to the fungible world of exchange is the resistance of the eye that does not want the world's colors to vanish.

—Theodor Adorno¹

Adorno theorised that the essence of a thing was inextricably linked to its aesthetic qualities and material appearance. By choosing to make an animation in advance of drafting a screenplay, the screenwriter prioritises the imaginative free flow of images and their materiality. This is a common approach of animators such as Hayao Miyazaki and Shaun Tan who dispense with the need for a script.² Priority is thereby attached to the visual narrative as a conduit of meaning. Similarly, Rudolf Arnheim gave primacy to the potential of art and the image to convey meaning in film through a synthesis of aesthetic, symbolic and scientific considerations. Arnheim theorised that it was between the difference of how reality is perceived and the shaping capacity of the film materials or *Materialtheorie*, that

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1966), trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 404.

² Kathryn Millard, *Screenwriting in a Digital Era* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), pp. 77-97. Shaun Tan allows the narrative concept to grow through reflection and a process of drawing images. In his illustrated book, *The Arrival*, (Sydney: Hodder Children's Books, 2007) the idea of written language itself is questioned as the world of the immigrant is made to appear alien in a visual story without words. See also Tom Mes, 'Hayao Miyazaki', *Midnight Eye*, [uploaded 7 Jan. 2002] <<http://www.midnighteye.com/interviews/hayao-miyazaki/>> [accessed 25 January 2016]. *Spirited Away*, (2001, Jap., 124 mn), directed by Miyazaki, is an animated feature from Studio Ghibli. It was originally and organically storyboarded without a script before the English-language Disney adaptation.



gave rise to the creative potential of film as art.³ Thus when Arnheim wrote of colour in 1932, he recognised that the spectacular and decorative function of colour that was associated with early commercial films as opposed to the coherence of the avant-garde film, fell short of the potential of colour to signal narrative meaning.⁴ Soon after this, the convention of guided realism was consolidated by the theory of 'Colour Consciousness' (Kalmus: 1935), and this impacted Hollywood until the 1950s and beyond so that the potential of colour remained somewhat neglected in the evolution of film and screenwriting.⁵

The phenomenology of colour and its affect is insufficiently researched in screenwriting practice or film studies even though it could offer potential for new narrative structures and meaning. If understood and constructed within a visual narrative system from the initial concept, colour affect could offer a new approach to expressing, apart from dialogue, individual subjectivity and inner states of being within the language and form of the screenplay itself. The creation of an animation, 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' (2016), as research-led practice, sought to determine whether colour affect has such narrative potential for the screenwriter and whether image-based forms or more literary forms of 'writing' better realise inner states of being. The animation is based on a popular Victorian rhyming poem, *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat* (1871) by Edward Lear, of which there have been numerous adaptations across film, music, theatre, and animation.⁶ Visual adaptations have tended towards an illustrative interpretation of the characters and themes in Lear's poem, however a more abstract or semi-representational adaptation was undertaken in, 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' to represent a deeper and darker layer of meaning within the poem, that is the oppositional values within an impossible dream, through an emphasis on the use of colour interaction.

Although first written for children, *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat* has darker undercurrents if an elopement between two species of animal predators, an impossibility under natural law, is understood symbolically as a risky escape from

³ Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 2, 9.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 66-7. See also: Rudolf Arnheim, 'Remarks on the Color Film,' *Sight and Sound*, 4:16 (1935), p. 162.

⁵ Natalie Kalmus, 'Colour and Consciousness', *Journal of S.M.P.E.* 25: 2 (1935), p. 140. Richard Misek, *Chromatic Cinema: A History of Screen Color* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 39-46. Wendy Everett, ed. *Questions of Colour in Cinema: From Paintbrush to Pixel (New Studies in European Cinema)*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). Misek argues that the use of colour and how it is understood has been aligned and/or limited to genres like fantasy, the musical and epic cinema within the western entertainment tradition and film history.

⁶ Edward Lear, 'The Owl and the Pussy-Cat', in *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (London: Robert John Bush, 1872), pp. 285-86. 20th Century Fox released an early Technicolor animated version of Lear's poem (Donnelly, 1939) which was scripted by John Foster as a comic love triangle. Foster's adaptation highlights the satirical witticism of Lear's poem, that is the incompatibility of the owl and cat couple, as well as the predatory nature of the cat. These kind of dark undercurrents become narrative and phenomenological concerns in terms of colour affect in the animation 'Colours of a Nonsense Song'. View the animation here: <<https://vimeo.com/channels/1121857>>. Enter the password 'Colours---Metoudi---DOVETAIL' to view 'Colours of a Nonsense Song'.

the repressive moral code of Victorian society.⁷ The proleptic power of fairy tales in conveying children's difficult experiences was famously advocated by Bruno Bettelheim, a psychologist and Holocaust survivor.⁸ Guided by his thinking, I have combined a metaphoric approach to narrative meaning with the use of colour affect and image association resonating with inner states of being. The animation 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' is grounded in the notion of an impossible relationship and impossible circumstances where oppositional values are denoted by colour interaction. The elaborated narrative takes a new direction in the subsequent written screenplay where the value of liminality, the metaphoric image, and the use of colour affect combine to serve as vehicles of a cathartic revelation for two survivors of trauma.

Colour and Binary Opposites

Colour has the power to express emotion as is demonstrated by early twentieth century art movements like Expressionism and Fauvism, and in the contemporary paintings of artists like Eamon Colman, in which '[c]olour is a vehicle for honesty'⁹, catching the changing and subtle traces of emotion linking interior and exterior human states of being to place. By emphasising saturated colour interaction, equiluminance, and juxtaposition in the animation, any emotional associations with colour in the visual narrative aim towards a more dynamic range, alternating between sharp contrasts, vibrating boundaries, and a blurring of colour borders.¹⁰ This pattern of colour interaction supports the ironic tone of a fantastic romantic adventure in which the shifting boundaries between the two main animal characters, lovers, and predators in the natural world, are locked together and paired.

⁷ Julia B. Corbett, *Communicating Nature: How We Create and Understand Environmental Messages* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006), p. 186. Corbett states that the morality-obsessed Victorians demonised animal carnivores. Lear, a satirical cartoonist and poet, enjoyed poking fun at the conventions of Victorian society. His humanised animal characters and animalised humans such as the Yongy Bongy Bo, the Dong, and the Jumblies are often marginalised by being placed adrift at sea or on the edge of civilisation.

⁸ Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2010) views the fairy tale as a story metaphor for therapeutic use with the child. Bettelheim's claims for fairy tales' curative potential in psychology have been challenged by both Jungians and Freudians, but what all theorists have in common is that the fairy tale provides associative meaning for inner states, as do other mythic stories. See Jack Zipes, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Fairytales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 495.

⁹ Eamon Colman, *Dawn nets set to capture the lofty endeavour of the human spirit*. (2010), <<http://www.eamoncolman.com/work/BeforeDark/dawn.asp>>, [accessed 25 May 2016].

Brancaleone, David, "Visual Conversation" David Brancaleone Talks to Eamon Colman about his Painting', <<http://visualartists.ie/articles/van-marchapril-2014-visual-conversation-david-brancaleone-talks-to-eamon-colman-about-his-painting/>> [uploaded 14 April 2014], [accessed 15 June 2016]. For Colman, colour, subjectivity, and emotion are synonymous. Robert Plutchik ascribes the primary emotions and their opposites to primary colours, based on scientific observations of how colour functions in the behaviour of humans and animals. However story concepts and their structures have the potential to be aligned with colour in a relative sense according to narrative intentionality—there can be no fixed colour codes for all purposes since the experience of colour and its meaning is contingent to cultural, variation, physical or environmental differences, and subjective individual interpretation. Robert Plutchik, 'The Nature of Emotions', *American Scientist*, 89.4, (2001), pp. 343-50. See also, Alan Manning and Nicole Amare, in 'Emotion-spectrum response to form and color: Implications for usability' (International Professional Communication Conference, 2009), pp. 1-9, for a hypothesis based on empirical research about how associative colour and pattern link meaning and emotion.

¹⁰ Joseph Albers, *Interaction of Colour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 61.




Fig.1: *Dawn nets set to capture the lofty endeavour of the human spirit*, [detail]
© Eamon Colman, 2010

The owl character in the animation is based on the likeness of a Eurasian owl. This species of owl is capable of killing mammals the size of a cat, and the domestic cat is capable of attacking birds larger than itself. Both the owl and the cat in nature prey on small rodents. Therefore, Lear's poem presents us with an alternative reading if we surmise that an elopement between predators can be understood as unstable. In the face of a conflict of desire, either animal could wish to devour the other. Based on this reading, food and sensuality combine in the animation so that the desire for food and sexual desire are shown to cross over. There is an underlying philosophic and narrative potential for a love/hate dynamic in which desire and death can be seen to shadow the two anthropomorphised animal characters in Lear's poem, as when the cat ironically refers to the owl as an 'elegant fowl', the noun connoting what is commonly known to be food for humans and as an associative play on the meaning of the verb 'to foul' by an immoral aspect. Novelist Anthony Burgess, who tried to bring a film about Lear to the screen, commented on the darker aspects of the poem:

The marriage is forbidden, the union of a bird and a mammal is denied by nature, like the union of a man and a man; the cat and the owl have had to flee the real world to declare their love [... , and] the illustration of the wedding conducted by the turkey makes nonsense of all this. Everything is happiness, joy unqualified[...]. Life is bigger than Victorian England.¹¹

¹¹ Allan Massie, 'Edward Lear Was the Master of Glorious Nonsense' (London: Telegraph Media Group Ltd, 2012), <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/9261071/Edward-Lear-was-the-master-of-glorious-nonsense.html>> [accessed 3 March 2016].



With such an undercurrent of potential conflict of interest and ironic tone already present in the poem, the visual narrative of the animation has been approached as a relationship between juxtaposed colour hues. The use of semi-representational imagery and non-naturalistic colour fields within the *mise en scène* of the animation engages the viewer's imagination with the sensory elements of colour affect. It is generally agreed by experts that hues can be allocated to one of two universal groupings according to how colour is sensed both in experience and by association: warm or cool hues. Warm colours range from values that span hues of yellow, orange, red and magenta. Cool colours range from green, blue, and indigo to purple. When paired as opposites across the warm/cool divide, or if generally juxtaposed in visual compositions, colours have the potential to be interpreted according to the binary opposites of a narrative intentionality.

Colour and Conflict in Research-led Creative Practice

Colour designation as applied to the two characters in the animation revolve around warm/cool groupings, forming the conceptual basis for the visual narrative where the hot pink range is allocated to the character of Pussy-Cat and the deep blue conversely to Owl. A fantastic but tense courtship between the two animal characters has been visualised in the animation through the use of colour opposition and contrast. Colour style ranges from the non-naturalistic to an optical sense of colour agitation, or else the predominance of the hot magenta pink and its near opposite, ultramarine. The ocular push-and-pull of colour opposites within the visual narrative gives cogency to the thematic interpretation of the poem as a fantastic but tense romantic adventure between the male and female characters, one wherein the blurring of boundaries goes 'hand in hand'¹² with an emotional journey at sea. Colour hues within the intense pink range are associated with the Pussy-Cat piano motif and her presence on screen in the animation. The music motif is at least an octave higher than the rest of the musical arrangement for a mixture of ecological and sensory reasons.¹³ Because magenta is a warm hue, it comes forward in visual terms, and this colour denotes the attraction of Pussy-Cat to Owl. The contrast of ultramarine blue when set against hot pinks throughout the visual narrative resonates at a sensual level because of the effect of colour opposites. Filmmakers in the 1920s like Walther Ruttmann had already begun to experiment with the sensory qualities of colour affect, in terms of contrast of hue and value, along with abstract forms that show contrast between movement, curved shapes and angular edges. In *Light Play Opus I* (1921) and *Opus III* (1924/25), the warm/cool visual structure aligns smoothly flowing sequences in music with the serene values of the blue hue in conjunction with sensuously curved

¹² Edward Lear, *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, ed. Jackson Holbrook (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 63 (27).

¹³ L. Froschauer and L. Jonas, 'Cats Prefer Their Own Beat', *Science and Children*, 52.9 (2015), pp. 10-11.

flowing shapes at times, while aligning angular shapes, contrasting hues and more stimulating music at other points. The principle of colour contrast takes a form of pure abstraction in the *Opus* series, whereas, in ‘Colours of a Nonsense Song’ the affective value of the warm/cool structural divide is harnessed to qualities of character opposites according to a narrative intentionality, along with contrasting qualities of pitch and timbre in musical terms. Likewise in some contemporary experimental film, narrative power is allocated through colour affect, as seen in, *Water and Power* by Pat O’Neil (1989),¹⁴ where the colour contrast of the red/blue



Fig. 2: ‘Colours of a Nonsense Song’. © Alison Metoudi, 2016

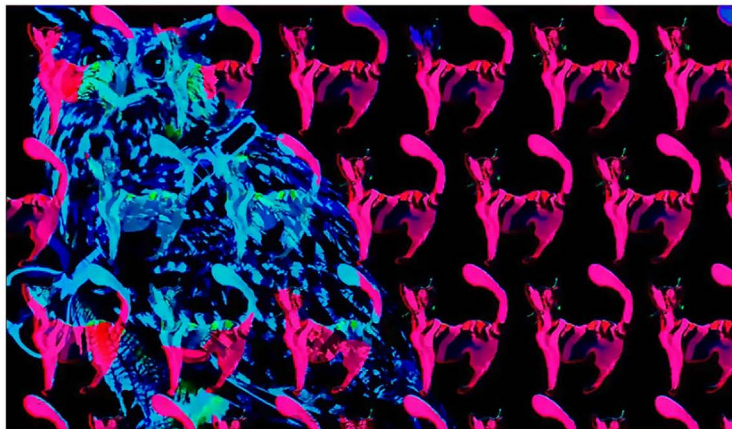


Fig. 3: ‘Colours of a Nonsense Song’. © Alison Metoudi, 2016

¹⁴ Experimental filmmaker Pat O’Neil layers and superimposes the red/blue images of a dog and a man over a river to connect the narrative theme of fire and water with the desert and the city in *Water and Power*, where access to water is a political battle in the Los Angeles desert region.



Fig. 4: *Water and Power*. © Lookout Mountain Studios, 1989.

hues is a tactile metaphor for the hot and cold opposites of fire and water. *Water and Power* utilises the sensorial affect of colour to underline a political message about stolen water, similar to 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' where colour juxtaposition carries the political message of an impossible dream, made more poignant by the recent political problem of Brexit (British withdrawal from Europe) and the contemporary humanitarian crisis where millions of refugees have set sail for Europe to escape war, persecution, or economic hardship. The fairy tale like dream of overseas adventure and romance is distorted in 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' where the action runs contrary to the message of the spoken monologue in a counter narrative. The use of colour opposites in the animation helps to underline this thematic conflict.

Colour Contrast and Sound Synchrony

Narrative intention is interwoven throughout the visual narrative in 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' as Owl serenades Pussy-Cat by plucking a sitar in near parallel time to the spoken narrative, while the accompanying visual narrative is dominated by the conflict between the female/male aligned pink/blue dynamic of the two animal characters who traverse the sea and sky in a dream-like space. If hot pink denotes the high-pitched and sharp piano synchrony of Pussy-Cat and if blue, spiritually associated with sea and sky,¹⁵ denotes the softer and lower-

¹⁵ See Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: MFA Publications, 2001) and Kate Higginson, 'Derek Jarman's "Ghostly Eye": Prophetic Bliss and Sacrificial Blindness in Blue', *Mosaic*, 41.1 (2008), pp. 77-91.

Kandinsky and Jarman favoured the spiritual/emotional associations of the colour blue with sea and sky. Indian music on the sitar favours spirituality and emotion; blue is denoted accordingly.



pitched sound of the sitar played by Owl, these colour/sound combinations complement each other as chromatic/aural opposites. Colour assignment and sound synchronies enforce the love/hate push-and-pull between the two animal characters, as tensions are perceived through the visual sensation of colour and sound contrasts. The rhythm of colour contrast between cuts intensifies in 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' progressing from a series of horizontal and vertical movements near the start of the animation, to a swirling fast moving riot of juxtaposed colours and circular patterns by the end. Intensity of narrative theme is continuous from start to finish in the animation as indicated by the repetition of the iconic cat imprint in the background (Fig. 3). This sort of repetition emphasises the devotion of Owl to Pussy-Cat and denotes a sense of the inescapability from the dynamics of opposition, as constantly highlighted through colour contrast between the characters. Thus, in varying degrees, the power of colour affect, by the use of colour contrast and the warm/cool complimentary colour divide can be harnessed to focus on character difference, underline narrative theme and indicate thematic conflict within the structure of a visual narrative as demonstrated by *Light Play Opus I-IV*, *Water and Power*, and 'Colours of a Nonsense Song'. However, it is within 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' that character conflict, narrative conflict, and visual contrast in colour terms are both symbiotic and a constant principle from start to finish thus creating a dynamic series of contrasting colour affects to impact the visual senses. This principle of visual contrast is a fundamental component that could translate well into terms of conflict within the visual structure of the written screenplay.

Colour Crosses Boundaries

Newton,¹⁶ theorised that white light is made up of the phenomena of colour hues, which he named the spectrum. Later it was discovered that the human eye has three cones, red, green and blue through which to read all visible colours of the spectrum,¹⁷ whereas Goethe,¹⁸ theorised that the phenomena of complementary colour is to do with perception, or what goes on in the brain. Accordingly, when white light is reflected towards the shadow side of an object, the complimentary colour that appears is in fact an illusion invented by the brain. Colour is therefore a relative experience since the environmental and physical

¹⁶ Sir Isaac Newton, 'A Letter of Mr. Isaac Newton ... containing his New Theory about Light and Colors'. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*. No. 80 (February 1671/2), pp. 3075-87.

¹⁷ Thomas Young, 'The Bakerian Lecture: On the Theory of Light and Colours'. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*. 92 (1802), pp. 12-48.

¹⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Theory of Colours: Translated From The German, With Notes*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2014), p. 19, 35.

conditions that determine how colour is perceived differ widely.¹⁹ Thus, the choice of colour and how it functions, has the potential to emphasise complex and contingent narrative meaning when prior thought is given to processes of conceptual construction within the visual narrative of the screenplay. Further, because the brain already functions naturally to create the illusion of colour opposites in white light, the ability of the brain to create meaning and narrative associations from colour polarities cannot be underestimated: nature itself could be theorised to assign meaning through aposematic colour that signals danger.²⁰ Therefore the potential of colour as a narrative tool has wide-ranging implications for artists, filmmakers and writers. Thomas Hardy, Alfred Hitchcock and Pablo Picasso are a few well-known figures who demonstrated that the symbolic and expressive use of colour can underpin narrative theme.²¹ The use of colour affect in screenwriting practice likewise has narrative potential. This claim should come as no surprise since artists for centuries have exploited the potential of colour to strengthen their artistic and theoretical vision. Giotto's lapis lazuli pigment is reserved for his religious subjects in a stylised illustrative sense; Rembrandt's earthy brown palette is attuned to his sympathetic naturalistic portraiture; Salvador Dali's intensely vibrant hues underpin the power of the dream.²² Giotto and Rembrandt utilise colour for its associative meaning and cognitive response, whereas Dali could be said to combine cognitive and affective interests in colour where its intensity is synonymous with the dominance of the unconscious state.

Similarly, there have been some experiments in colour motifs in films, such as the expressive use of red in Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert* (1964). Both films use the red hue to signal mental turmoil. When colour abstraction apart from an illusory sense of realism, is assigned to a visual scheme it can express inner states of being and thus enhance

¹⁹ Junichi Murata, 'The Multi-Dimensionality of Colours', in *Perception, Technology and Life Worlds* (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Press, 1995), pp. 85-102.

<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/rih/phs/events/200405_PEACE/papers/JunichiMURATA.pdf> [accessed 30 March 2016]. Research shows that bees see the ultraviolet spectrum, unlike humans, and birds connect colour with hormonal function. Screenwriters can exploit the multi-dimensionality of colour affect in narrative constructs.

²⁰ Stanislav Komarek, *Mimicry, Aposematism, and related Phenomena: Mimetism in Nature and the History of its Study* (München: Lincom, 2003), p. 55, 81. Komarek refers to how the brightest colours of red, yellow, black or white in certain insects or animals warn predators of toxicity. Komarek speculates that animals could have the unconscious capacity to create and use colour affect/ pattern in the same way that a writer uses language for meaning, p. 126.

²¹ See Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003), Pablo Picasso's *La Vie/Life* (Cleveland Museum of Modern Art, 1903) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964, Eng., 130 min.) In Hardy's novel the use of the red hue lends an imaginative intensity to concepts of desire and death by associating Tess with strawberries and blood. Picasso's painting *La Vie* utilises the distancing effect of the blue hue to denote a sombre mood. Hitchcock interrupts the action in *Marnie*, with flashes of red to indicate the female protagonist's agitated state of mind.

²² Regarding Dali, see Jeanne Willette, 'Surrealism and Freudian Theory: The Marvellous Mind of Surrealism' <<http://www.arthistoryunstuff.com/surrealism-freudian-theory/>> [accessed 30 March 2016].

an intuitive response to the visual narrative. Colour phenomena arguably makes possible a more immersive experience for the viewer, since colour and its effect operate at a primitive level within the brain, causing an immediate bodily reaction as is the case when the red hue is viewed.²³ In the animation the animal characters have entered the frame, dwarfed in scale and surrounded by churning waves of juxtaposed colour hues and contrast (Fig. 6). Combined with differences of scale



Fig. 5: *Marnie*. © Universal Pictures UK, 2005.



Fig. 6: 'Colours of a Nonsense Song'. © Alison Metoudi, 2016.

the principle of contrast creates an overwhelming sense of the expressive capacity of colour abstraction to emphasise exterior/interior states, in line with the conflict of the male/female characters and their colour coding. Compare this approach to

²³ Andrew J. Elliot, Aarts Henk, 'Perception of the color red enhances the force and velocity of motor output', *Emotion*, 11(2) (Apr 2011), pp. 445-49.



Fig. 7: *Red Desert*. © BFI Video, 2011.

the use of colour and abstraction in the shipyard scene near the end of *Red Desert* (Fig. 7),²⁴ where the red/black dynamic emphasises Giuliana's dislocation within the exterior/interior dimensions of the screen space. Huge objects are rendered almost unrecognisable due to distortions of framing techniques, lighting and the use of rack focus, all set against the small figure of Giuliana seen towards the far right of the frame. Colour and pattern visually represent Giuliana's instability. Thus, the use of colour affect and abstraction, when combined within a screen setting, can potentially situate the protagonist in an exterior and interior space simultaneously, representing the shifting and sometimes indistinct boundaries of external experience and inner states of being.

Colour Affect and Screenwriting Practice as Research

By producing a short animation as an approach to researching screenwriting practice, I have demonstrated how colour interaction apart from changes to dialogue can give new meaning to a well-known poem beloved by children and adults alike, by emphasising oppositional narrative undercurrents in colour terms. Therefore, the use of colour phenomena and the principle of binary opposites between the romantic/predatory characters and warm/cool colour structures supports a new tone of dark irony and nihilism towards Lear's poem that is expressed through the visual narrative. Colour affect and interaction offers the potential to structure narrative meaning in screenwriting practice because film is primarily a visual medium. In the subsequent screenplay, 'Unspoken Colours'

²⁴ Murray Pomerance, *Michelangelo Red Antonio Blue: Eight Reflections On Cinema* [Kindle], (Berkeley: University of California Press Ltd. 2011), locations 1723, 2032, 3483, 3607, 5063. Antonioni was heavily influenced by the Abstract Expressionism of the 1960s, and went to elaborate lengths to alter the appearance of the exterior location in some of his films. He painted over grass in *Blow Up* (1966), a cart of fruit in *Red Desert* (1964), and the mountains and desert in *Zabriskie Point* (1970), to help achieve his aesthetic aim of showing the unseen through the use of expressive colour.



(2016), the subject of trauma in the real world and the idea of the fantasy world operate in conjunction as a vehicle for therapeutic intervention. This was achieved by linking or contrasting the two worlds with the associative and dissimilar application of colour interaction and its affect. Through use of the red hue and the black/white contrast of values between the real and dream worlds, action within the *mise en abyme* of 'Unspoken Colours' bridges to the real world, thereby permitting a hidden disclosure.²⁵ The delineation of the interior/exterior space is blurred within the spatial boundaries of the visual narrative, as is the line between reality and fiction, in 'Unspoken Colours' by the utilisation of the *mise en abyme*, as a window through which to view the foreshadowing dream, imagination and hidden memory, along with its abstract colour structures, colour affect and cognitive associations.

By implication, colour affect is a tool that screenwriters can utilise to signal conflict, contrast, irony and change in terms of motif, narrative tone and narrative intentionality. The classic cause and effect chain of plot in narrative structure, with its linked beginning, middle and end,²⁶ can be rendered in visual terms by a thoughtful construction of progressive, monochromatic, analogous, triadic, quadratic or differentiating colour relationships.²⁷ In episodic, non-narrative, or thematic screenplay structures the use of colour affect could unify a theme or signal change between scenarios. In non-linear narrative structures, modulated shifts in colour intensity, or colour value, colour conflict, contrast, texture, detail, scale, line, and harmony, could be utilised to fine tune the visual and written narrative to mark different durations, places, spatial perspectives, or historical episodes, when the range of multisensory visual dimensions of colour phenomena are exploited. All narrative structures could when linked to a careful system of colour relationships, be harnessed to underpin a range of tones from narrative irony

²⁵ Özlem Ayduk, Ethan Kross and Jiyoung Park, 'Stepping Back to Move Forward: Expressive Writing Promotes Self-Distancing', *Emotion*, 16 (2016), pp. 349-64. Creative writing therapies use techniques such as re-enactment to dramatize difficult experiences. Research shows that creative distancing is beneficial to sufferers of trauma.

²⁶ See Horace, *Ars Poetica* (c. 19 BC), lines 189-90, for the first mention in literary theory of the division of a dramatic work into acts. Horace advocated the five act structure, whereas Aristotle (*Poetics*, c. 335 BCE), his predecessor advocated the division of a plot structure into three parts; "A whole is what has a beginning and middle and end" (1450b27). The use of cogent colour relationships could be structured to match a rising chain of action in the screenplay structure.

²⁷ Analogous colour structures are closely harmonising and sit closely together on the colour wheel. Screenplays that highlight harmony with respect to ideology, nostalgia or gradual change could utilise an analogous colour structure. Triadic and quadratic colour structures utilise colour that is evenly spaced at three points or four points respectively on the colour wheel. This arrangement could correspond to the screenplay that is structured in three or four parts or acts etc. Monochromatic colour schemes unite foreground and background, simplify or exaggerate and therefore are suited to extreme narrative perspectives or drama. Split complementary colour structures harmonise two colours, with a third as an opposing opposite and could emphasise a story point or different characters in visual terms. Other combinations of colour structures and narrative systems might be made possible within a careful framework, and need not be limited to those outlined here.



to dramatic opposition in keeping with narrative meaning. Thus the potential of colour affect apart from changes to dialogue, offers a new layer of meaning that screenwriters can utilise within the grammar of the written screenplay, to enrich a narrative, modulate tone, structure scenes, or run counter to the written word.

Different approaches to conceiving the cinematic screenplay might yield different insights into what is gained or lost by comparison. The industry demands that screenplays be formatted in a standard way to streamline the various stages of the production process, but advances in digital technology, new forms of screenwriting practice across digital platforms and new methods of film distribution online are challenging this expectation. As Kathryn Millard argues,²⁸ if screenwriting is understood as an art form, then experiment and change are essential to its evolution. To test the potential of colour affect as a screenwriting tool, the animation 'Colours of a Nonsense Song' was reimagined in standard screenplay format, utilising *Final Draft*. Creative limitations were set so that the narrative follows the progression of Lear's poem, albeit with some changes in dialogue and additional scenes aimed at producing a dramatized cinematic reinterpretation. Because of an uninterrupted spoken flow in the case of the animation, the visual narrative is fast-paced and limited to the duration of the spoken phrases and verse. Despite this sort of limitation, it was still possible to play off the images against the spoken narrative to create new meaning through image association, action and colour affect. Prioritising image-making as an approach to writing with digital tools made it possible to discover in visual terms how additive colour relationships, comprising of the primary hues, red, green and blue, sometimes mixed with unexpected results on screen, in particular when colour opposites interacted with digital filters, between layers and between edits during production processes. A considerable amount of experiment during the digital editing process resulted in a range of contrasting colour palettes, that at times unlocked further metaphoric associations.²⁹ Aesthetic and narrative discoveries concerning the potential of colour and colour affect then fed back into the screenplay narrative as visual themes and metaphors became clearer.

During the process of turning the animation into a written screenplay, the sequentiality of dialogue and action within the space of the page, with its linear orderliness, in *Final Draft* lent itself to the elaboration of a visual narrative in step with the dialogue, but it also provided a form that allowed for the possibility of

²⁸ Millard, pp. 4-8.

²⁹ In Fig. 8, the use of digital filters transformed a wave to resemble a number of visual themes such as the appearance of an image from the *Rorschach Test*, an animated shadow, or the dark facial markings belonging to a cat.

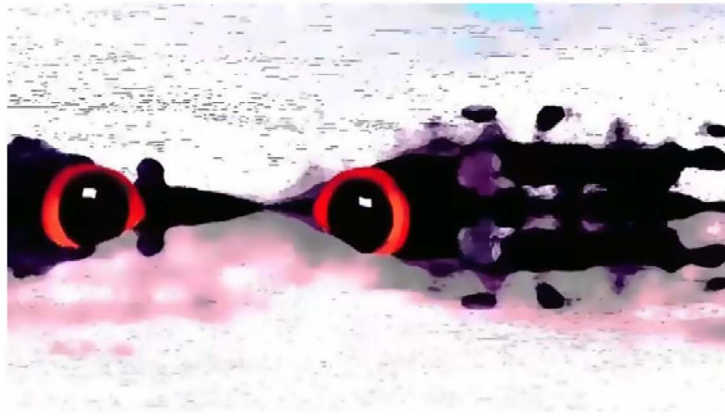


Fig. 8: 'Colours of a Nonsense Song'. © Alison Metoudi 2016.

digression from the uninterrupted monologue of Lear's poem. The process of sequential writing, as opposed to an illustrative or counter-illustrative take on a spoken monologue, opened up visual and thematic narrative possibilities further via ellipsis. Additional narrative material was added to the written screenplay, that is the mobile hospital and Holocaust scenes, as real-world scenarios made possible by breaks in duration or ellipsis between spoken narrative elements. The addition of real world scenes serve to increase the overall dramatic tone and cinematic elements of the screenplay; enhancing and contrasting with the significance of the fantastic scenarios. Thus the sequentiality of *Final Draft* facilitates a step-by-step narrative progression that gives equal weight to image and sound. Other formats could be developed that facilitate the screenplay's visual narrative but that research lies outside the scope of this paper.³⁰

In 'Unspoken Colours' the two worlds of liminal fantasy and reality are shown to differ in visual terms. In comparison to the strong plays of light and deep staging of the real-world scenes, colour is highly saturated, two dimensional and juxtaposed between warm and cool hues in the dream sequences. However, use of the red hue bridges the real world scene and the dream scene in phantasmagorical combination when the character of Yalda recalls a traumatic experience during the mobile hospital sequence. The use of colour affect within this scene provides an intense contrast, in the same way as the little girl dressed in red is picked out from a procession of the doomed in *Schindler's List* (1993). The link in terms of colour contrast between the two worlds of dream and reality in 'Unspoken Colours' is the black/white stripes of Tomi's costume and the monochromatic palette of the

³⁰ Nick Sousanis, in *Unflattening* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) gives priority to visual thinking in his graphic novel styled PhD thesis. Further, the area of interactive storytelling that includes the storyboard, games, digital media and sound/image assemblies, could provide alternative forms if structured to facilitate the full potential of the image, sound, and written language of the screenplay.

hospital scene; the colour of strawberries; and the colour values of the night, snow and fire during the Holocaust sequence. During the hospital scene, the red hue of the strawberry pattern and blood, set within the cool colour of the ocean, provides an intensity of colour contrast that coincides with the climax of the scene:

EXT. BRINY OCEAN – ROCKY OUTCROPS – DAY

In the colourless cold half-light of early morning, SHRIEKING GULLS circle the dark rocky outcrop in the ocean.

SWISH! OWL SWOOPS across the water, and swiftly SCOOPS the PUSSY-CAT clean out of the BRINY WAVES.

A pattern of brightly coloured strawberries bends and ripples in and out of focus, on top of the cyan tinged grey waves.

Clearer, and a bright little dress patterned with red strawberries, comes into view.

The strawberry pattern is splattered with vermilion blotches of blood.

The bloody dress floats over the sullied cyan brine of the SLURPING WAVES.³¹

The black/white costume of the internee, a trope of Holocaust films, and the black/white contrast of light within the *mise en scène* mirror the mimetic and transformational role of Tomi as a mentor protagonist merging the two uneasy worlds of fantasy and reality, where good and evil are opposed. Within the real-world scene in 'Unspoken Colours', there is relief from the warring hues of juxtaposed colours that dominate previous scenes, but dramatic tension is maintained because of a shift to the black/white polarity that continues with heavier tones into the nocturnal Holocaust sequence. Within the overall visual structure of the screenplay there is a progressive shift from the flat abstract field of view and intense saturated contrasting colours that push and pull against their complimentary opposites in the fantasy scenarios, towards a black and white or contrasting polarity of values, with an increasing depth of field in the real world scenes of trauma and war.

The colours of the visual narrative within the screenplay 'Unspoken Colours', is similarly structured to the film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), that is

³¹ Alison Metoudi, 'Unspoken Colours,' (2016), p. 14.



according to the differences between the use of black/white and colour, as the unhappiness portrayed in the stark real world visual scheme is set against the Technicolor expressiveness of the elated fantasy scenes – a form of visual escapism from depression. Further, the Holocaust is associated with the leading song from *The Wizard of Oz*, ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’, because of its link with the theme of Jewish suffering and exile.³² The use of colour affect in the written screenplay ‘Unspoken Colours’ has been harnessed prior to the final film production process, to link reality and fantasy, differentiate irony and tragedy between acts and within scenes, indicate shifts between interior/exterior states, signal character qualities, emphasise the leading characters, denote visual/sound synchrony and bring about an intuitive impact in response to important characters and objects within the written narrative.

Conclusion

Thus it is possible to structure a written screenplay according to the principles of colour interaction and colour affect, in advance of the final production, when pre-production research entails practice-based visualisation methods such as the creation of a digital animation as prototype in research-led practice. In general, colour affect dominates the structure within the visual narrative of the screenplay in ‘Unspoken Colours’ to project a reality that is at once hidden, perceptual and unavoidably present. Findings show that the *caméra-stylo* approach to ‘writing’ with images by utilising the potential of colour affect within the visual narrative can open up new paths and aesthetic choices for the screenwriter. The creative aspect of image-making as an approach to research-led visualisation in screenwriting practice helps to bring visual and thematic clarity through imaginative processes that enhance narrative creativity, the results of which can be utilised when constructing a written screenplay later. In the case of the narrative potential of colour affect, however, not all knowledge can transfer to written language, since colour affect is realised through the eyes and brain in combination. Colour affect must be seen to be appreciated fully. However, the theoretical implications of colour affect along with its narrative value, is comprehended cognitively, and therefore, as demonstrated by ‘Unspoken Colours’, such knowledge is transferrable into the written language of the screenplay. Further, the improvisational aspect of an organic approach to the screenplay, by ‘writing’ with images facilitates narrative creativity, layered

³² Jewish song writers, Harold Arlen and Isadore Hochberg wrote ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’, based on the historical exile of the Jewish people and the Russian pogroms, but the song if understood as a mythic dream of a homeland, amazingly prefigured the beginning of the Holocaust by less than a week, with the Nazi invasion of Poland in late August 1939; this coincided with the official release of the film. See ‘The Wizard of Oz & The Voice of Melody - August 15, 2014’. In JFGNH (Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven), <<https://jewishnewhaven.org/israel-overseas/news/the-wizard-of-oz-the-voice-of-melody-august-15-2014>>, [uploaded August 15 2014], [accessed May 25 2016].



meaning, visual systems of representation, and an instinctual response to the material and its essence that would be impossible to discover through written processes alone.

The potential of colour affect in screenwriting practice could be further investigated beyond the binary opposites of character and conflict, or narrative intention and colour allocation within the *mise-en-scène*, by for example an exploration of other narrative structures wherein lie qualities and subtle nuances of colour, colour affect and subjective experience; a consideration of how colour affect, surface texture, density, line pattern and shape, could impact narrative time and space; or how narrative time could be altered, manipulated or displaced in the film narrative by an investigation of how colour affect and gaps, ellipses and expanded time impact each other; or how colour affect could perhaps influence and displace a sense of geography or place; and how colour affect, emotion and memory combine between reality and the imagination. Narrative structure when combined with a conceptual understanding of how to use the principle characteristics of colour affect within the screenplay, could as demonstrated form a prototype for the ‘written’ screenplay and the process of screenwriting itself, in the widest sense, that is both perceptual and knowledge based. But it is the creation of a visual reference such as an animation in this case, as prototype for a reflective discourse between creating, reading and writing, during the process of drafting the screenplay in research-led creative practice, that really explores how colour affect impacts visual perception or generates new meaning from the multimedia material itself, since the screenplay is a medium that will be ultimately translated into another perceptual form, the film. Thus a dual approach to screenwriting practice as research, where experimental digital image manipulation, production processes and the processes of rereading literary writing, drafting and rewriting the screenplay, inform and cross-fertilise each other, comes a step closer to the notion of the screenwriter as ‘Total Filmmaker’,³³ a term that Eric Knudson uses to advocate the artistic freedom of the screenwriter/director. The synthesis between the image, colour phenomena, colour affect and the written screenplay, in a dynamic cross-media approach to screenwriting practice, facilitates and promises a multi-sensory and perceptual representation of human inner states of being, and this is of vital importance if the screenwriter is to give fuller expression to the experience of trauma within the structure of the visual screenplay narrative in a perceptual medium and form such as film.

³³ Erik Knudsen, ‘The Total Filmmaker: thinking of screenwriting, directing and editing as one role’, *New Writing*, 13:1. (DOI: 10.1080/14790726.2016.1142571, 2016), pp. 109-29.



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Split second image changes from 'Colours of a Nonsense Song'. © Alison Metoudi, 2016 .